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Future leaders starting to plan

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June 17, 2010

By ANGELA D. SYKORA asykora@pioneerlocal.com

Grayslake Central High School student Anna Yoder is someone you should know. The ambitious 15-year-old just wrapped up a busy freshman year in which she spent eight months serving as a Lake County representative for a youth-driven program sponsored by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

During the 2009-10 Future Leaders in Planning (FLIP) program, Yoder and students from seven northeastern Illinois counties met Saturdays at the Willis Tower in Chicago for day-long brainstorming sessions on how to make the future better for their communities.

"It was fun and there was a really positive atmosphere," said Yoder, adding she made many new friends and gained new insight into how young people can change the future.

The students participated in regional planning, listened to guest speakers and took field trips to places including Chicago housing developments, the Glen in Glenview and Metra headquarters to learn more about housing, transportation, the environment and government.

Yoder said she was particularly interested in transportation and housing issues.

"Chicago has a lot of ways to get around without cars. In Grayslake, there aren't enough bus lines or ways for teens to get around easily," she said.

Yoder also learned about housing needs and the struggle of lowincome families and the homeless.

"I didn't realize how many people were without homes. There are a lot more homeless than we think.'

ACTION ORIENTED

Yoder, whose older sister Paula was chosen for last year's program, said it was an honor to be selected as a Lake County representative. To be considered. Yoder had to write an essay about why she thought it was important for young people to have a vested interest in the future of their community. She was also required to obtain a teacher recommendation.

Yoder's desire to participate in the FLIP program, established in 2008, is simple. The future, she said, "will be here sooner than you think."

"Everyone thinks the future is going to be someone else's problem, but we need to be ready.

Yoder believes you can't complain if the future doesn't turn out how you pictured it if you don't take an active role in helping to shape it. Teens, she said, can really make a difference when they work collaboratively.

The student representatives worked on group projects designed to help youths implement different aspects of the CMAP's "Go To 2040" comprehensive plan. Residents in various communities were also surveyed for the 2040 campaign last fall.



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For their final presentation at Chicago's National Museum of Mexican Art on April 20, Yoder's group, Human Services, presented the concept of reducing and relieving stress in high school students. Their idea was to create an after-school wellness program called WOW (Working on Wellness), in which teens could get relaxation techniques, learn about time management and how to balance their academic and social lives. Just having a comfortable venue to vent about their stresses would be a start, said Yoder, who hopes to present the idea to the Grayslake Community High School District 127 Board of Education this fall.

To learn more about FLIP, see photos and review the students' final presentations, go to www.cmap.illinois.gov/flip.aspx

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